

Let's achieve real reform, rather than just talking about it.

ASSISTANCE FOR PUERTO RICO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIÉRREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, I have received a lot of calls in my office in the last few days. Some are offering help to the people of Puerto Rico, but many are from moms and dads hoping to hear from their children, from children hoping to hear from their moms and dads, from grandchildren worried about an elderly grandparent who is still in Puerto Rico.

Two weeks after the hurricane hit Puerto Rico, there are people who have not been heard from and people who are calling for help, but have not received it yet.

I have had Members of Congress, State and local officials, and people from all over the country call me to tell me about someone who needs help getting out of Puerto Rico. Their mom is still in Puerto Rico, or a cousin is on dialysis and has not been heard from, and can I help them get to a hospital on the mainland.

These calls are heartbreaking because they are all about U.S. citizens who should be treated better 2 weeks after a calamity, even a devastating calamity like Hurricane Maria.

Most of the calls have been from my constituents in Chicago. Here is one example that was summarized to me by one of my staff members in Chicago.

She said:

Congressman, I received a call from—I won't give her name—she lives here in Illinois, but has an aunt who is in a hospital in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, who is very ill with cancer. She is requesting assistance from our office to get her aunt out of Puerto Rico so she can receive treatment in Chicago.

Mr. Speaker, if you take a look at my Facebook page, you will see the same sort of thing.

Manny writes:

The municipality of Arecibo, a coastal town in the northern part of Puerto Rico, has not received help. I spoke to my family there via text and she said the situation there is dire.

Yanny writes:

Please don't forget Aibonito. The people there are hungry, thirsty, and there are many sick who need medicine. Thank you.

I just spoke 10 minutes ago to Maria in Chicago. She said:

Congressman, I haven't heard from my parents in Cayey.

Mr. Speaker, it is tragic. These messages break my heart. I don't know what to tell people, except to say that help may be on the way soon. Of course, that is not good enough.

I have no explanation for why it is not already there. It certainly is not the fault of the brave men and women who work for FEMA and the Armed Forces. I spent a lot of time with them in Puerto Rico while I was there, and they are working hard. They are tired.

They are facing the difficult task of finding and feeding people.

From what I saw in Puerto Rico this last weekend, what I am hearing from my constituents, and what I am hearing from my family and friends, we need to seriously ramp up the use of full capacity and capabilities of the U.S. Government, including the U.S. military, to rescue people.

They don't need paper towels tossed at them like T-shirts at a sports arena. They need helicopters, bridges, cell towers, and generators. This is why I was, frankly, horrified by our President's performance yesterday on the island.

He said that Puerto Rico was making his budget out of whack, as if the monetary cost of saving lives is what we should be focusing on, or that an agenda that cuts taxes is really as important as saving people's lives in danger.

From the beginning, he has focused on the cost of saving Puerto Ricans, not the moral duty to save them. He has essentially said that Puerto Ricans are sitting around looking for handouts and not helping themselves, which is not at all what I saw in Puerto Rico this past weekend, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the President said we should all feel proud because only 16 people have been listed as officially killed by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

Really? We should feel proud?

He said that a real tragedy like Hurricane Katrina killed many more people. Thousands, he said.

So I guess he is saying: Hey, only 16. Why the big fuss?

That number doubled overnight, by the way. Everyone understands that it will go up further still when contact is made with all parts of the island.

I look at it a little differently. To me, it is almost like Hurricane Maria posed a test to the United States of America and to our President. The hurricane said: I am going to take 34 souls. That is 34 too many, but that is what I am going to take. Now I am leaving it up to you, America, Mr. President, and you the people in Congress to tell me what you will do to prevent that number from going any higher. Are you getting medicine to the sick? Are you evacuating the aunt with cancer or the cousin on dialysis? Are you providing safe drinking water and flights to safety?

Mr. Speaker, I don't think today's body count is the right metric to look at, but, rather, we should be challenging ourselves to make sure it doesn't go higher.

The most serious event in Puerto Rico's modern history may not qualify as a significant disaster to our President, but let us not sit back and allow the body count to change the President's mind. We just can't wait that long.

21ST CENTURY AVIATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WOODALL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOODALL. Mr. Speaker, I have the honor of serving on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and I rise today in support of the 21st Century Aviation Innovation, Reform, and Reauthorization Act. We call it the AIRR Act in the committee.

H.R. 2997 is a unique opportunity in a bipartisan way to do something big together for the American people.

I know we hear that a lot in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, but so often it seems like it is just out of our reach. That is not the case today.

Under Chairman SHUSTER's leadership on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I have worked to craft the kind of bold, forward-thinking reform that America's 21st century aviation system needs. It is in reach today to make that the law of the land.

When we sit together to reauthorize the FAA, Mr. Speaker, it isn't just about attending to the Nation's business of ensuring safety of air travelers across the country. Of course, that is a priority, but it is an opportunity to implement the kind of innovative reforms that we have seen across the globe and that America needs to reestablish itself as the world's aviation leader.

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We have an opportunity together to deal with a bloated bureaucracy, to reduce taxpayer costs, to improve efficiency all in an industry that is designed to prioritize customer's experience and customer service.

Mr. Speaker, Americans pioneered air travel, and we remain the safest aviation system on the planet. But our own outdated bureaucracy, our own outdated rules are standing in the way of American innovators and making air travel more time consuming, more costly, and safety innovations more difficult.

Mr. Speaker, with this legislation, we have a chance to empower our innovators, to better serve our travelers, and to preserve the world's finest commitment to safety, as we always have.

As is the case, Mr. Speaker, with any heavy lift, with any big task, there are always concerns in keeping America's system safe and the American people safe a highest among those concerns.

Mr. Speaker, what you need to know today is that with the support of General Mattis, with the support of the Department of Defense, the AIRR Act has focused on preserving the primacy of preserving national security in our aviation infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, the bill has the support of those dedicated public servants at the Pentagon because it has been sensitive to these issues. It maintains the DOD's access and management of airspace. It doesn't allow user fees that are charged to passengers to be passed onto taxpayers through the DOD. It leaves intact the President's and the DOD's proper authorities to manage this space.